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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted in Iowa to determine why adults eligible for adult basic education (ABE) frequently fail to participate. The study was conducted on a representative sample of 129 persons who had not completed high school, were aged 18 or older, and had not attended ABE classes, through open-ended questions refined into telephone interview questions. The most important reasons advanced by nonparticipant adults reflected negative perceptions about ABE. These reasons were low perception of need, perceived effort, dislike for school, and situational barriers. Low perception of need is associated with older age. Situational barriers (marriage, children to care for, employment) derive from the role responsibilities of adults in midlife. In general, the factors that inhibit participation were more potent for older adults than for younger ones. The study concluded that it may be more difficult to recruit older adults who see no need for a high school diploma. Therefore, the ABE population, if refined to include only those who have not completed high school and who want to do so, is being much better served than previously thought. Finally, the study recommended that more thought be given to scheduling to aid in recruiting younger adults who have fewer negative perceptions but have more situational barriers to education. (The survey instrument and 14 references are appended.) (KC)

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REASONS FOR NONPARTICIPATION AMONG IOWA ADULTS WHO ARE ELIGIBLE FOR ABE

BY

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We also wish to thank those people who were willing to be interviewed and who answered our questions so that we now have a much clearer picture of those who choose not to take advantage of the ABE program. We now recognize we need to accept their right to decline.

Finally, we want to say how much we have enjoyed this opportunity to work together on these studies, which taken as a whole, now supply a portrait of the ABE population in Iowa. Hal devised the strategies to collect data, analyzed and wrote up the results. Tom has been intimately involved on all three projects, on this last one as a consultant where his longer view kept us on track. John has managed to keep us together on conference calls, looking ahead far enough to see problems and possibilities. Jane conceived the project, kept everyone in line, took care of all the details and is extraordinarily pleased with the results. It has been a major commitment for all of us.

Reasons for Nonparticipation Among Iowa Adults
Who Are Eligible for ABE

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ABSTRACT

This report is the third in a trilogy of research studies which were designed to assist Iowa ABE professionals in planning and policy formulation. The first presented a sophisticated descriptive analysis of participants in Iowa ABE programs. The second focused on ESL students. This report focuses on those who are eligible for ABE but have never attended.

The study addresses four questions: 1) What sociodemographic and background variables describe Iowa adults who are eligible for ABE but fail to attend? 2) Why do Iowa adults who are eligible for ABE fail to attend? 3) Is there an underlying structure to the reasons why persons who are eligible fail to attend? 4) What background and demographic variables are associated with nonparticipation?

To establish as representative sample as possible, a screener survey was sent to a random sample of Iowa adults. In an unobtrusive manner, subjects were asked whether they had completed high school, were age eighteen or older, and had ever attended ABE. If subjects had not completed high school and met other eligibility criteria, they were asked to volunteer for a telephone survey with the promise of a five dollar payment. Of the 9000 screener surveys sent, 1321 completed surveys were returned. Of these, 175 were from eligible subjects who volunteered for the study.

Subjects were interviewed via telephone with a survey which was developed in part from open-ended interviews with ABE students. A total of 129 interviews were completed for a response rate of .74.

Of the 32 reasons for not returning to high school listed in the telephone survey, the six with highest mean scores are: I would feel strange going back to school, There aren't many people in adult high school classes who are my age, Going back to school would be like going to high school all over again, I am too old to go back to school, I don't know anything about adult high school classes, and A high school diploma wouldn't improve my life. Five of these six seem to pertain to attitudes toward or perceptions of ABE and seem to relate to a perception among nonparticipants that they simply do not belong in school.

When the 32 reasons for nonparticipation were subjected to factor analysis to determine if an underlying structure were apparent, four interpretable factors resulted: Low Perception of Need, Perceived Effort, Dislike for School, and Situational Barriers.

Correlations between the factor scores of the factors and sociodemographic and background variables were then computed. Low Perception of Need correlated significantly with age (r=.60) and with most age-related variables. Perceived Effort and Dislike for School failed to correlate in a meaningful way. Situational Barriers, however, correlated with variables suggestive of mid-life age-set status such as marriage, number of children in the home, and full-time employment.

Taken together, findings suggest that the proportion of the ABE target population which fails to participate tends to be older. Coupled with the finding that perceptions of need for ABE decline with age, there may well be a large percentage of the target population for whom there is very little demand for ABE.

Perceived Effort and Dislike for School are reasons for nonparticipation which cross-cut the population. However, Situational Barriers appear to be most salient for adults in mid-life, and in Iowa, as elsewhere, adults of this age-set predominate among those who do attend ABE.

Reasons for Nonparticipation Among Iowa Adults Who Are Eligible For ABE

BACKGROUND

The Context

This report presents the findings of the Iowa Nonparticipation Study, the third study in a trilogy. The first study, which was completed in 1986, focused on students who were enrolled in ABE programs. The second, completed a year later, investigated ESL students. The present study is designed to enhance our understanding of why those eligible for ABE in Iowa all too frequently fail to participate even though ABE programs are free and widely publicized.

All three studies have several things in common. The first, and perhaps the most important, is that the basic purpose of these studies was to assist Iowa ABE teachers and planners to enhance their professional effectiveness. In this there is the following logic which weaves a common thread throughout the three projects.

Perhaps unwittingly, and certainly for lack of information, the ABE population in Iowa (and indeed elsewhere) has been treated in recruitment and instruction as if it were a single homogeneous group. Yet in reality the ABE population is comprised of many sub-groups which can be expected to behave differently in respect to ABE. Accordingly, a major objective of the Iowa studies was to identify relevant subgroups within the population and to refine an understanding of them in expectation

that recruitment and instruction could then be tailored to group preferences.

A second commonality among the Iowa ABE studies rests with the research designs. In each case structured interviews were used to gather data. However, rather than developing items from theory and "imposing it" on the reality of Iowa, the most vital items for the research were developed from in-depth, open-ended interviews with low-literate adults themselves. Because we wanted to be inclusive as possible in generating items, the result was a montage of considerable complexity. To refine this picture -- to simplify the complex --sophisticated statistical techniques designed to "cluster data" were employed.

The final commonality of the Iowa ABE studies is powerfully reflected throughout, albeit implicitly. While these studies are certainly on ABE, they are also with ABE. The dedicated involvement of Iowa ABE professionals with this study not only informed its design and procedures, but also enabled us to collect data with a completeness, which in our experience, is simply phenomenal. As a result, these studies truly belong to us all.

Nonparticipation

In 1977 the National Advisory Council on Adult Education reported that less than three per cent of the ABE population was being served. Although these data are somewhat outdated, and the experience of Iowa may differ from the national norm, it is quite clear that ABE is not serving the vast majority of those who are

eligible. Why? The fact that the ABE program has been chronically under-funded may have something to do with it. Yet we all know that regardless of how intensely we try to recruit, our success is frequently marginal. Why are so many low-literate adults so impervious to our messages? It is the purpose of this research to provide some answers.

There is a basic logic to nonparticipation. Voluntary learners fail to participate for one of three reasons: 1) They are not sufficiently motivated to attend. 2) They are sufficiently motivated, but are in some way deterred. 3) They are simply unaware that ABE exists. The research literature on participation addresses all three possibilities, although motivation, deterrents, and awareness often are identified by different terms.

Motivation

One of the most influential works on motivation in adult education was written in 1961 by C.O.Houle who induced that adults are motivated to participate because learning is a means to a goal, because they enjoy the activities associated with learning, and because they value learning for learning's sake. In a very rough sense, these motivations were reflected in our first year's work with participants in ABE. We found (Beder & Valentine, 1987) that ABE students are motivated to attend because of the following seven reasons: Self-Improvement, Family Responsibility, Diversion, Literacy Development, Community/Church Involvement, Job Advancement, and the Urging of Others.

Subsequently in our second year's work (Beder and Valentine, 1988), we found that Iowa ESL students are motivated to participate in order: to improve themselves through social integration, to help their children, for job/economic reasons, to function better/reduce isolation, to become empowered, to gain reading and writing skills, and to contribute to their native lands.

Most of the work on motivation, however, has looked at why adults participate rather than why they do not. For this reason, in viewing nonparticipation the concept of demand may be more useful than that of motivation. "Demand" acknowledges that motivation to participate is, in fact, a continuum (Kotler, 1975: Beder, 1986). At one end is negative demand. When demand for ABE is negative, potential students would actively seek to avoid ABE. The next demand state is no demand, in which case a potential learner would be simply indifferent to ABE. Finally, there is positive demand, and in this case participation is likely, assuming of course that there are no unsurmountable barriers and that the potential learner is aware of ABE offerings.

Deterrents

The work on deterrents (frequently called barriers) to participation is extensive. For the sake of simplicity, deterrents can be conceived as being of two types: situational barriers, which by definition are external to the individual and beyond his or her control, and dispositional barriers, which are

internal to the individual and are a product of values, attitudes or beliefs. In one of the few works which focused on deterrents to participation in ABE, Hayes (1988) identified five basic deterrents: Low Self-Confidence, Social Disapproval, Situational Barriers, Negative Attitude to Classes, and Low Personal Priority. In another study focusing on ABE, Fingeret (1983) studied 43 low-literate adults. She found that many low-literate adults adapt to their state of low-literacy and compensate by relying on non-print media and by asking friends and relatives to assist them with literacy tasks. This suggests that the process of adaptation itself may serve as a kind of barrier.

In this research, we wished to deal with nonparticipation holistically, rather than to divide our study into motivational, deterrents, and awareness components in accord with previous research. Consequently, we addressed the following questions:

1. What sociodemographic and background variables describe Iowa adults who are eligible for ABE but fail to attend?
2. Why do Iowa adults who are eligible for ABE fail to attend?
3. Is there an underlying "structure" to the reasons why persons who are eligible fail to attend? That is to say, is there a pattern to these reasons?
4. What background and demographic variables are associated with nonparticipation?

METHODS

Population and Sampling

The target population for the study was all Iowa residents who were: (a) eligible for ABE by virtue of the fact that they were eighteen or older and had not completed high school and (b) had neither attended nor were attending ABE classes.

One of the reasons why more research has not been conducted on ABE nonparticipants is the difficulty in identifying a sample representative of this population. High school dropouts are difficult to locate as they move frequently and are often reluctant to admit that they lack a high school diploma.

To acquire a representative sample for this study, we employed the following strategy: First a screener survey was sent to a sample of 9000 Iowa adults to identify a population which met the eligibility criteria of the study. This brief survey, printed on State Department of Education letterhead and signed by a state official, posed several basic questions about adult education in Iowa and collected preliminary demographic information. Although the information gathered from the screener survey was to be used in secondary analysis, its basic purpose was to identify a pool of high school dropouts. Thus, at the end of the survey respondents were asked to volunteer to participate in a telephone interview if: 1) they no longer went to public school, 2) they did not have a high school diploma or GED, and 3) they had never attended ABE classes. As an inducement, potential subjects were told that although not all volunteers would be

called, those that were called would be paid five dollars for their time.

The 9000 individuals who received the screener survey were randomly drawn from the Survey Sampling, Inc. data base of directory-listed households for the state of Iowa. Survey Sampling, Inc. is a private sampling firm. The data bank is compiled from all United States white-page telephone listings and is supplemented with automobile registration data. In order to improve the chances of contacting the households of high school noncompleters, we specifically targeted households with incomes less than $20,000. This was achieved by using an income predictor derived from a multiple regression analysis of both individual household data and census data at the block-group level. A sampling frame was then constructed for all qualifying records at the selected level. The efficiency of this targeting was predicted to be 60 percent or better. (Survey Sampling Inc., 1988)

Of the 9000 screener surveys sent, 1321 completed surveys were returned. Of the completed screener surveys, 175 included the names, addresses and phone numbers of volunteers eligible for the study.

Instrumentation

The basic data collection instrument for the study was a 52 question telephone interview survey which was divided into four parts. The first part contained a series of questions which verified that the subject was age eighteen or older, had not

finished high school, had not attended ABE, and was thus eligible for the study. The second included four open-ended questions designed to gather data about why the subject had not completed school and what the implications for non-completion had been for his or her life. These open-ended questions were subsequently analyzed and coded into categorical responses.

The third section contained 32 items in Likert format which pertained to reasons why the respondent did "not take classes to complete high school." These 32 questions were at the heart of the study and in data analysis constituted a scale which operationalized the concept "reasons for nonparticipation." The internal consistency of the scale proved to be very good (Cronbach's alpha=.85).

To ground the validity of these items in the reality of the subjects themselves, items were derived from open-ended interviews with 21 high school drop-outs who had never participated in ABE. Respondents were asked a series of questions designed to determine why they had not completed high school as adults. All interviews were tape-recorded, and whenever possible, items which derived from these interviews were phrased using the actual words of the interviewees.

The fourth section included fourteen sociodemographic and background items which had proved to be potent variables in previous participation studies (Johnstone & Rivera, 1965; National Center for Educational Statistics, 1978; Beder & Valentine, 1987). Variables included native country, marital

status, number of children, number of children living with subject, community size, sex, employment, job satisfaction, last grade attended, health status, disabilities, age, and income.

Data Collection

Those who responded to the screener survey, who met eligibility criteria, and who agreed to be interviewed by telephone (with promise of a five dollar payment) were then called by telephone interviewers trained by the researchers. Interviewers were instructed to try to reach subjects at least ten times before giving up on a case, and on the average 3.7 calls were made per successful contact. The results of each attempt to reach a subject were recorded into a log appended to the instrument. Of the eligible respondents who agreed to the interview (N=175), a total of 129 completed interviews resulted for a response rate of .74.

Data Analysis Strategy

The first step in data analysis was to compute basic descriptive statistics (frequencies and means) to ascertain the parameters of the sample. Then the 32 nonparticipation items were subjected to factor analysis (SAS, principal components with Varimax rotation). Factor analysis is a procedure which statistically groups variables, reasons for nonparticipation in this case, according to common patterns in individual's responses. The factors which resulted then represented the underlying structure of nonparticipation.

The initial factor analysis resulted in ten factors with eigenvalues greater than one. However, after examining factor solutions for between two and ten factors, and based on the results of a scree test, we ultimately choose a five factor solution. Measures of sampling adequacy (Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure=.72, spheracity significant at the .0001 level) indicated that the sample size was adequate for factor stability (Norusis, 1985). Factor scores, an individual's score for each factor, were then derived for each of the five factors, and correlations (Pearson's) between the factor scores and demographic variables were computed.

Expanded Sample

When data were analyzed, we found that our sample was heavily weighted towards older nonparticipants. This is not surprising, as for several reasons which we will discuss later, there are many more older adults who have not completed high school than there are younger adults. However, in order to have numbers sufficient to provide an accurate descriptive profile of the younger groups which represent the actual market served by ABE in Iowa, we needed to supplement the original data set with nonparticipants aged fifty or younger.

To obtain as representative a sub-sample as possible, the ratio between the population of each Merged Area to the total population of Iowa was first computed. Then this ratio (i.e., each merged area's per cent of the total Iowa population) was applied to our target N of 100. This resulted in a population

proportionate target for each merged area which was then supplemented by four as a "cushion" in case a targeted nonparticipant could not be contacted.

To identify nonparticipants, ABE teachers were asked to ask their ABE students to "nominate" persons they knew who were aged fifty or younger and who met the other eligibility requirements for the study. Each ABE student was paid five dollars for a nomination, if used, and the person nominated was paid the same amount if he of she accepted the interview.

These procedures resulted in 114 nominations who were interviewed via telephone in the same way as for the basic sample. Of these, 40 proved to be ineligible for the study. Of the 74 who remained, 15 could not be contacted for a final N of 59 and a response rate of .80.

Throughout this report we will refer to the original sample as the Basic Sample. This sample is the "purer" of the two and will be used for all analysis unless stated otherwise. The second sample (N=188), which is the combination of the Basic Sample and the aged fifty and under sample, will be termed The Expanded Sample.

FINDINGS

Demographics and Background Variables

The first step in data analysis was to compute basic descriptive statistics for nonparticipants. These are presented in Table one along with comparative data from the first Iowa ABE

study which focused on those who were enrolled in programs. Both samples are representative and can be generalized with acceptable confidence to Iowa ABE nonparticipants and participants in general.

Table 1
Comparison Between Participants and Nonparticipants on Selected Descriptive Variables

Variable	Nonparticipants (N=129)	Participants* (N=323)
Native born	.98	.97
Married	.57	.37
Never Married	.09	
Separated/Divorced	.09	
Widowed	.26	
Community size		
5000 or less	.40	
>5,000, <10,000	.16	
>10,000, <100,000	.39	
100,000 or more	.05	
Female	.55	.66
Employed full time	.26	
Employed part-time	.13	
Full-time homemaker	.19	.26
Retired	.42	
Unemployed	.04	
Means		
Last grade completed	9.1	9.1
Job Satisfaction (1=low,3=high)	2.3	
Health status (1=low,5=high)	3.3	
Age	56.7	30.0
Family income	$23,502	$11,194
Age 50 or younger	.35	
Age 65 or older	.42	

*Comparisons are made between the Basic Sample of the Nonparticipation Study and Iowa ABE participants of the first Iowa ABE Study (Beder & Valentine, 1987).

It is clear that the characteristic which best separates participants from nonparticipants is age and age-related variables such as widowhood and retirement. On the average nonparticipants are 57 years old; about two-fifths are over age 65. In contrast, the average age for participants is 30.0. This finding is hardly surprising. Nationally, about 53 percent of those eligible for ABE are over aged 60 (U.S. Department of Education, 1986), and this is largely due to the fact that educational opportunities were much poorer fifty years ago. It is also clear that family income is lower for participants than for nonparticipants, and this is true despite the fact that the nonparticipant sample was slightly and deliberately skewed towards persons with lower incomes in order to garner a higher percentage of noncompleters. It is possible that the higher incomes of nonparticipants are a product of their age; adults accumulate wealth as they grow older. However, it should be noted that .42 of the nonparticipants are retired, and this should suppress income.

Open Ended Items

As mentioned earlier, the Nonparticipant Study Telephone Interview Survey contained three open-ended items. The first asked respondents why they did not complete high school. This was followed by a question which asked if they felt their lives might have been different had they completed high school. Sixty-one percent answered yes. Then, those who answered affirmatively were

asked how their lives might have been different, and those who responded negatively were asked why their lives would not have been different had they completed high school. Responses were subjected to content analysis and coded for statistical analysis. Table two presents reasons for a failure to complete high school.

Table 2
Reasons for Not Completing High School

Reason	Percent (N=133)
1. Had to work on farm/went to work on farm	11.3
2. Had to work/went to work	18.7
3. Poor family finances, had to help	18.8
4. Failed to complete courses/ got behind	6.8
5. Parental interference	9.0
6. Got married/ pregnant	14.0
7. Illness	3.8
8. Disliked School	4.5
9. High school too far distant/not available	12.0
10. Personal conflicts with school	7.5
11. Didn't need high school	6.0
12. Other	5.3

Note: Respondents could list more than one reason

The five most frequently mentioned reasons are: poor family finances/had to help out (18.8), had to work/went to work (18.7), got married/pregnant (14.0), high school too far distant/not available (12.0), and had to work on the farm/went to work on the farm (11.3). Aside from marriage and pregnancy, the reasons why nonparticipants dropped out of school are to a large extent reflective of the rural, depression-shocked economy of the 1930's, a time during which almost half of them dropped-out.

Table three presents nonparticipants perceptions of how their lives might have been different had they completed high school. Over two thirds indicate that they would have had better jobs or careers. This reason far overshadows all others.

Table 3
Nonparticipants Perceptions of How Their Lives Would Have Been Different Had They Completed High School

Reason	Percent (N=81)
1. Would have better job/career	67.9
2. More respect	1.2
3. Be smarter/know more	2.5
4. Would have gone to college	6.2
5. Read, write, compute better	4.9
6. Easier life in general	11.1
7. Would have traveled, met more people	2.5
8. Other	4.9

Note: Respondents could list more than one perception

When nonparticipants who indicated that their lives would not have been improved by completing high school were asked why (Table 4), four reasons stand out pretty much equally. They are pleased with life as it is; they are pleased with their job as it is; they would be doing what they are doing now anyway, and they feel that they did not need a diploma. In short, for those who feel their lives would not have changed, high school is perceived as being simply irrelevant.

Table 4
Nonparticipants Perceptions of Why their Lives Would Not Have Been Better Had they Completed High School

Reason	Percent (N=40)
1. Am pleased with life as it is	25.0
2. Pleased with job as it is	20.0
3. Would be doing what I am doing now anyway	25.0
4. Didn't need highschool/was not important to me	27.5
5. Other	2.5

Note: Respondents could list more than one perception

Reasons for Nonparticipation

Table five addresses the first research question, "why do adults who are eligible for ABE fail to attend?" It lists the reasons for not participating in ABE ranked according to their mean scores.

Table 5
Means and Standard Deviations for Reasons for Not Participating in Adult Basic Education

Item	Mean*	SD
I would feel strange going back to school.	2.3	.83
There aren't many people in adult high school classes who are my age.	2.1	.84
Going back to school would be like going to high school all over again.	2.0	.87
I am too old to go back to school.	2.0	.96
I don't know anything about adult high school classes.	2.0	.88
A high school diploma wouldn't improve my life.	2.0	.89
I don't have enough free time to go back to school.	1.9	.91
I am not motivated enough to go back to school.	1.9	.89
I don't need a diploma.	1.9	.95
It would take me too long to finish high school.	1.8	.89

I am usually too tired to go back to school.	1.8	.86
I have to take care of my family.	1.8	.88
I don't have enough energy to go back to school.	1.7	.80
It would cost me too much money to go back to school.	1.7	.86
I have too many time conflicts at work to go back to school.	1.6	.84
I don't think I could use the things I would learn in school.	1.6	.83
I am too set in my ways to go back to school.	1.6	.82
There is too much on my mind to go back to school.	1.6	.81
I didn't think that adult high school classes would be very good.	1.6	.83
I don't think I am smart enough to go back to school.	1.5	.78
I didn't like school so I don't want to go back.	1.5	.74
School is too hard.	1.5	.72
I just don't like school.	1.4	.74
I couldn't pay for child care or transportation.	1.4	.71
Going back to school wouldn't make me any smarter.	1.3	.67
My friends would laugh at me if I went back to school.	1.3	.67
I am too lazy to go back to school.	1.3	.66
I already know enough.	1.3	.60
I haven't known where there are any classes.	1.3	.67
I don't go back to school because nobody knows that I don't already have an education.	1.3	.76
I move around too much to go back to school.	1.2	.54
I felt that my family wouldn't like it if I went back to school.	1.1	.33

* Based of a three point Likert scale with 3 being high.

As previously noted, nonparticipation items were generated qualitatively from open-ended interviews with persons who, though eligible for ABE, had never participated. However, the items which resulted generally reflect the work of others conducted at different times in different states. Dispositional barriers, which relate to persons attitudes and beliefs, (Johnstone &

Rivera, 1965; Cross, 1981) are evident in such items as "I would feel strange going back to school." Likewise, situational barriers, which pertain to conditions external to the individual, are reflected in such items as "I have too many time conflicts at work to go back to school" and "I have to take care of my family." Similarly, deterrents to the general population's participation noted by Darkenwald and Valentine (1985) and by Hayes (1988) in respect to ABE students are reflected in the 39 reasons for nonparticipation of this study.

Table five shows that of the six reasons for nonparticipation which have the greatest mean scores, all of which are 2.0 or greater on a three point Likert scale. Five of the six (I would feel strange going back to school, There aren't many people in adult high school classes my age, Going back would be like going to high school all over again, I am too old to go back to school, A high school diploma wouldn't improve my life) pertain to negative perceptions of, or attitudes towards, ABE. The item "I don't know anything about adult high school classes" can best be interpreted as an informational barrier.

Underlying Structure of Reasons for Nonparticipation

Although the means of the 32 items constituting reasons for nonparticipation are useful for the purpose of description, taken together the number of items portrays a picture too complex to fathom easily. For this reason, these items were subjected to factor analysis to determine whether an underlying structure were

apparent. The result of factor analysis, which addresses the second research question, is presented in Table six.

Table 6
Factor Structure for Reasons for Not Attending ABE Classes

Load	Mean	Variable
Factor I Low Perception of Need (mean item score=1.7)		
.68	2.0	A high school diploma wouldn't improve my life.
.68	1.6	I don't think I could use the things I would learn in school.
.65	2.0	I am too old to go back to school.
.64	1.4	I don't think that adult high school classes would be very good.
.63	1.3	Going back to school wouldn't make me any smarter.
.63	1.9	I don't need a diploma.
.53	1.7	I don't have the energy to go back to school.
.51	2.0	There aren't many people in adult high school classes who are my age.
.46	1.9	I am not motivated enough to go back to school.
*.45	1.8	It would take me too long to finish high school.
Factor II Perceived Effort (mean item score=1.6)		
.62	1.7	It would cost me too much money to go back to school.
.62	1.5	I don't think I am smart enough to go back to school.
.54	1.5	School is too hard.
.53	2.0	Going back to adult classes would be like going to high school all over again.
.52	1.6	There is too much on my mind to go back to school.
.49	1.8	It would take me too much time to finish high school.
.49	2.0	I don't know anything about adult high school classes.
.49	1.3	My friends would laugh at me if I went back to school.
.48	1.3	I haven't known where there are any classes.

Factor III Dislike for School (mean item score=1.4)

.76	1.4	I just don't like school.
.63	1.3	I am too lazy to go back to school.
.63	1.5	I didn't like school so I don't want to go back.

Factor IV Situational Barriers (mean item score=1.7)

.74	1.6	I don't have enough free time to go back to school.
.66	1.8	I have to take care of my family.
.48	1.6	I have too many conflicts at work to go back to school.

Note: The fifth factor has been deleted both from this table and from analysis due to low interpretability.

Criterion for factor loading= .45
* variables loading on more than one factor

The first factor, Low Perception of Need, contains items relating to perceptions of need such as "A high school diploma wouldn't improve my life" and "I don't think I could use the things I learn in school." Yet it also contains items which are clearly related to respondents' perception of their age-set status, for example, "I am too old to go back to school" and "There aren't many people in adult high school classes who are my age." It would seem that for this population, Low Perceptions of Need is associated with age.

The second factor, labeled "Perceived Effort", is constituted by variables which refer to the perceived effort it takes to complete school. Conceptually, these perceptions are of two types. On one hand they include items which refer to the effort which must be expended to participate in classes such as

"I don't think I am smart enough to go back to school", "It would take me too long to finish high school", and "School is too hard." On the other hand, however, this factor also includes items which extend beyond classes such as the effort required to overcome financial constraints (It would cost me too much money to go back to school) and the effort to overcome the general problems of life (There is too much on my mind to go back to school). It is interesting to note that the two items which refer to lack of information or awareness of ABE load on this factor.

Factor III, Dislike for School, contains three items, "I just don"t like school", "I am too lazy to go back to school", and "I didn't like school, so I don't want to go back."

In accordance with the literature on participation and deterrents to participation, the fourth factor has been termed Situational Barriers which Darkenwald and Merriam (1982) define as, "barriers [which] relate to an individual's life context at a particular time, that is, the realities of one's social and physical environment" (p.137). It includes three items: "I don't have enough free time to go back to school", "I have to take care of my family", and "I have too many conflicts at work to go back to school."

The last factor of the five-factor solution is the most difficult to interpret. It includes three items "I move around too much" (load=.64), "I already know enough" (load=.47) and "I don't have enough energy to go back to school" (load=-.45).

Although it was tempting to title it "Mobility" after the first "marker" item which loaded most highly, a more conservative stance was taken, and this factor was deleted from analysis as being uninterpretable.

Taken together, the five factors explain 46 percent of the variance, with Factors I through Factor V explaining 20 percent, seven percent, seven percent, six percent and five percent. The mean item scores of the factors are the best measure of factor magnitude and suggest that Low Perception of Need (1.7), Perceived Effort (1.6), and Situational Barriers (1.7) are about equal in magnitude and that Dislike for School (1.4) is of secondary importance.

Relationships Between Reasons for Nonparticipation and Sociodemographic and Background Variables

The next step in data analysis was to determine whether reasons for not completing school were associated with demographic traits, thereby addressing the third research question. To do so, factor scores were computed and correlated with demographic variables. Low Perceptions of Need correlated at the .05 level or better with separation or divorce (r=-.22), widowhood (r=.35), number of children in the home (r=-.25), full time employment (r=-.29), retirement (r=.53), last grade attended (r=-.18), health status (r=-.19), and age (r=.60).

Perceived Effort failed to correlate with any demographic variable, and Dislike for School correlated only with health status (r = -.17). Situational Barriers, however, correlated with marriage (r= .24), widowhood (r= -.27), number of children

in the home (r= .17), employed full time (r= .23), last grade attended (r=.32), health status (r= .18), and age (r= -.21).

Clearly, demographics were associated with reasons for not completing high school. Of considerable practical significance is the finding that Low Perceptions of Need correlates significantly and substantially with age and with age-related variables such as retirement. In accordance with Fingeret's (1983) finding, it may well be that as adults age, they adapt to a state of low-literacy to the extent that perceived need diminishes. The implication is that there may be little or no demand for ABE among older adults and that as a result, attempts to recruit them may be indeed problematic.

It is also worthwhile to point out that situational barriers correlates positively with marriage, number of children in the home, full-time employment, and negatively with age. Taken together, these variables portray a picture of adult mid-life, the age-set from which ABE in Iowa draws most of its participants. The implication is that participation can be enhanced if substantial attention is devoted to reducing the situational barriers which are functioning as deterrents to participation.

That Perceived Effort failed to correlate with any variable and that the negative correlations between Dislike for School and health status were slight, suggests that these reasons for nonparticipation cross cut the population. Efforts to ameliorate them may be "generalized" to all groups.

Age Differences

Analysis thus far has shown that age is a significant element in an understanding of nonparticipation in Iowa. Comparisons between the first Iowa ABE study, which investigated enrolled students, and the nonparticipation sample showed that participants are much more likely to be younger and indeed represent the "served market" for the state. For this reason it was necessary to analyze age differences in more detail. To do so, we utilized the Expanded Sample described earlier, a sample which is the amalgam of the basic nonparticipation sample and an additional sample of persons aged fifty or younger. Results of a comparison between nonparticipants over fifty and those fifty and under are shown in Table seven.

Table 7
Differences Between Nonparticipants Aged Fifty and Younger and Nonparticipants Over Fifty on Selected Variables

Variable	%<51	%>50
Reasons for nonparticipation		
School is too hard.	1.6	1.5
I don't have enough free time to go back to school.	2.1	1.9
I am too old to go back to school.	1.3	*2.4
I don't need a diploma.	1.3	*2.1
I am usually too tired to go back to school.	1.5	*1.9
There is too much on my mind to go back to school.	1.7	1.5
I haven't known where there are any classes.	1.3	1.3
I have to take care of my family.	*2.0	1.6
I am too lazy to go back to school.	1.3	1.4
Going back to adult classes would be like going to school all over again.	1.8	*2.1

I have too many conflicts at work to go back to school.	1.8	1.6
I don't think that adult high school classes would be very good.	1.2	*1.5
I don't think I could use the things I would learn in school.	1.4	*1.7
I don't go back to school because nobody knows I don't already have an education.	1.2	1.3
I don't think I am smart enough to go back to school.	1.4	1.6
I didn't like school so I don't want to go back.	1.5	1.4
I don't know anything about adult high school classes.	2.0	2.0
I am too set in my ways to go back to school.	1.4	*1.7
I already know enough.	1.2	1.3
I don't have the energy to go back to school.	1.3	*1.8
I move around too much to go back to school.	1.2	1.1
It would take me too long to finish high school.	1.5	*2.0
There aren't many people in adult high school classes who are my age.	1.6	*2.3
I am not motivated enough to go back to school.	1.5	*2.1
My friends might laugh at me if I went back to school.	1.1	*1.4
Going back to school wouldn't make me any smarter.	1.1	*1.4
I would feel strange going back to school.	2.0	*2.5
I just don't like school.	1.5	1.4
A high school diploma wouldn't improve my life.	1.4	*2.3
I couldn't pay for child care or transportation.	1.5	1.3
I felt like my family wouldn't like it if I went back to school.	1.1	1.1
It would cost me too much money to go back to school.	1.6	1.8

<u>Background Variables</u>

% Married	58	59
% Never married	22	2
% Separated/Divorced	19	1
% Widowed	1	38
% Live in:		
- communities 5000 or less	30	47

- more than 5000 less than 10,000	21	15
- more than 10,000 less than 100,000	43	31
- 100,00 or more	7	6
% Male	45	43
% Employed full time	42	16
% Employed part time	19	13
% Full time homemakers	31	13
% Retired	0	63
% Unemployed	12	1
Mean number of children	2.4	3.0
Mean number of children in the home	1.6	.2
Mean last grade attended	9.8	8.7
Mean age	33	69
Mean income	18,200	25,559

*Reasons for nonparticipation which separate younger from older by .3 or more points.

In respect to sociodemographic and background variables there are few surprises. Younger nonparticipants are more likely to be never married or separated/divorced. In fact approximately a fifth fall into each of these two categories while almost 2/5 of the older sample are widowed/widowered. Older adults tend to live in more rural locales than younger, and gender composition is about the same for each group. As might be expected, younger nonparticipants are more employed. Older nonparticipants have more children, but this probably results from the fact that older nonparticipants have more child rearing years behind them. Due in all likelihood to the effects of the Depression and poorer educational opportunity, older nonparticipants tended to drop-out of school at an earlier grade level. Interestingly, despite the fact that younger adults are more employed, older nonparticipants report higher incomes.

When we examine reasons for nonparticipation, the four highest ranked reasons for younger nonparticipants are not enough free time, having to care for one's family, not knowing about high school classes, and feeling strange about going back to high school. Feeling strange about going back to high school is the highest for both groups suggesting that this barrier is an extremely important one to overcome in programming.

Other reasons ranked above 2.0 for older nonparticipants are being too old, not needing a diploma, feeling that adult classes would be like going to school all over again, feeling that it would take too long to finish, perceiving that there are not many people their age in classes, low motivation, and believing that a diploma would not improve their lives.

Clearly, older nonparticipants tend to rate reasons for nonparticipation more highly which again suggests that demand for ABE among this group may be especially low.

Younger nonparticipants rate only one reason for nonparticipation more highly than do older nonparticipants -- " I have to take care of my family." In contrast, older nonparticipants rate fifteen reasons more highly than do younger adults. The five reasons which exhibit the greatest differences between older and younger groups are: being too old, not needing a diploma, perceiving that there are not many people in classes their age, lack of motivation, and the belief that a high school diploma would not improve their lives. These findings seem to corroborate earlier findings that low perception of need and

older age go hand in hand.

SUMMARY

In this report we have presented the results of the Iowa nonparticipation study, a study designed to assist ABE planners to refine their understanding of why those eligible for ABE all too frequently fail to participate. The study was conducted on a representative sample of 129 individuals who: (1) had not completed high school, (2) were age eighteen or older, and (3) had not attended ABE.

To fulfill its purpose, the study addressed four questions:

1. What sociodemographic and background variables describe Iowa adults who are eligible for ABE but fail to attend?
2. Why do Iowa adults who are eligible for ABE fail to attend?
3. Is there an underlying "structure" to the reasons why persons who are eligible fail to attend? That is to say, is there a pattern to these reasons?
4. What background and demographic variables are associated with nonparticipation.

Major findings are as follows:

1. In order to determine nonparticipants reasons for not participating in ABE, 32 reasons for nonparticipation were identified from open-ended interviews with 21 adult dropouts who had not participated in ABE. These 32 reasons were formatted into three-point likert scales for telephone survey administration. The six most important reasons (all above 2.0)

were: "I would feel strange going back to school", "There aren't many people in adult high school classes who are my age", "Going back to school would be like going back to high school all over again", "I am too old to go back to school", "I don't know anything about adult high school classes", and "A diploma wouldn't improve my life."

With exception of "I don't know anything about adult high school classes", the most highly ranked reasons have to do with negative perceptions about ABE. In general, these negative perceptions do not pertain to perceptions of poor quality. In fact "I don't think that adult high school classes would be very good" was ranked 19th of the 32. Rather, they seem to relate to a perception among nonparticipants that they simply do not belong in school.

2. Desiring to reduce the 32 reasons for noncompletion to a simpler and more basic structure, these reasons were subjected to factor analysis. Four interpretable factors resulted: Low Perception of Need, Perceived Effort, Dislike for School, and Situational Barriers. Taken together, these reasons represent the underlying structure of nonparticipation. Mean item scores for these factors indicate that Low Perception of Need, Perceived Effort, and Situational Barriers are the most important and are about equal in importance. Dislike for school is of secondary importance.

3. In order to determine if sociodemographic and background variables were related to reasons for nonparticipation, correlations were computed. Correlations are measures of association; they indicate how closely two variables are related to each other.

Low Perceptions of Need correlated significantly and positively with widowhood, retirement, last grade attended, and age (r=.60). Significant negative correlations were obtained for separation and divorce, number of children in the home, and full time employment. Taken together, these data present a clear picture: Low Perception of Need is associated with older age. Following Fingeret's (1983) analysis, we would infer that as adults age, they adapt to their state of non high school completion to the extend that perception of need declines significantly.

Situational Barriers, barriers that derive from the environment such as work conflicts and a need to care for children, correlated with such variables as marriage, number of children in the home, last grade attended, and full-time employment. This leads us to surmise that situational barriers to a great extent derive from the role responsibilities of adult mid-life. Perceived Effort and Dislike for School failed to correlate in a meaningful way; they seem to cross cut the population.

4. Using a specially created Expanded Sample which added younger adults to our Basic Sample, nonparticipants age 50 and younger were compared to nonparticipants over 50. Older participants rated reasons for nonparticipation considerably more highly than did younger. In fact, of the 32 reasons, younger nonparticipants rated only "I have to take care of my family" more highly than did the older nonparticipants. This suggests that the factors which inhibit participation in ABE are more potent for older adults than for younger.

IMPLICATIONS

From our findings flow several implications.

1. Persons eligible for ABE in Iowa fail to participate for four basic reasons: Low Perceptions of Need, Perceived Difficulty, Situational Barriers, and Dislike for School. With the exception of Situational Barriers, each deals primarily with perceptions about what ABE is like and how it might benefit the individual.

For most nonparticipants, the time between when they dropped out and now can be counted in decades; for most the act of dropping out is associated with negative feelings, feelings of failure, feelings of disappointment. After all those years it is no wonder that the most highly ranked reason for both young and old is "I would feel strange going back to high school."

Unless ABE is able to build an image and to project a message which contravenes these perceptions, we would expect recruitment to be problematic. It would seem that many of these perceptions which impede participation pertain to <u>SCHOOL</u> rather

than to ABE in specific. School has a special meaning and to a considerable degree it is threatening. Thus, it may be beneficial if ABE could be cast in the light of being different from SCHOOL, a school which is not a school, a warm caring place where everyone is welcome, a place to which you belong rather than an institution which you attend.

To a great extent such an atmosphere is consciously projected by ABE teachers in their classrooms. However, to experience ABE in this way a student must first enroll, and that does little for the nonparticipant who has never experienced ABE and is reluctant to walk in the door.

2. We have found that the great majority of the population is older and that Low Perception of Need increases with age. Furthermore, older adults tend to rank reasons for nonparticipation more highly than younger.

This means that there may be very little demand for ABE among older cohorts, and in fact, many may even seek to avoid ABE. One solution to this problem may be to create demand among this group with intensive promotional advertising. Yet this would be expensive, and success in our opinion would still be problematic. Another option, one that has been taken in many Merged Areas, is to serve older adults through cosponsorships with other institutions which serve them. This saves the time and effort normally spent in direct recruitment. A final option may simply be to recognize that persons who do not perceive a

need for ABE, for whom there is no demand, have a right to their feelings and should not be necessarily considered to be part of the target population.

One of the problems here is that ABE has been established to meet a social need, the need for a literate society. Yet it is not social need which motivates individual participation; it is individual need as perceived by high school noncompleters themselves. Thus, there is a gap between the target population as defined by social policy and the "actual" target population as defined by persons who are both eligible and favorably disposed to participate. If the ABE market were to be defined by those who perceive a need to earn a high school diploma, then it is clear that Iowa is serving a much higher percentage then previously thought. It is also clear that the actual market is younger, as evidenced by the fact that the average age of those enrolled is 30.

3. While Low Perception of Need increases with age, Situational Barriers, such as lack of free time, work conflicts, and having to care for one's family, was shown to be associated with such things as employment, and number of children in the home, and is negatively associated with age. Thus, while the participation of younger market segments is less deterred by low perceptions of need, they are more deterred by the constraints of adult mid-life role behavior. The direct implication is that scheduling needs to take this into account and that the provision of supportive

services such as child care might have a significant impact on recruitment.

4. The perception that going back to school would entail too much effort and a basic dislike for school are reasons for nonparticipation which cross cut sociodemographic groups. These reasons for nonparticipation are basically attitude clusters which represent perceptions which must be changed for participation to occur. Dislike for School is difficult to analyze, as it was beyond the limits of this study to determine just what about school nonparticipants disliked. However, mean item scores for this factor (1.4 on a scale which ranged from one to three) suggest that it is the least potent reason for nonparticipation.

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Respondent ID

Non Participant Study
Telephone Interview

(In making contact with the respondent, please try to follow the telephone scripts. Deviate only if it is absolutely necessary. It is very important that you ask the survey questions exactly as written.)

(script 1.) **HELLO, IS [FIRST NAME, LAST NAME] HOME?**

A. (if) you are asked to identify yourself say: I am calling for the State Department of Education. His/her name was given to us as someone who might be willing to answer some questions about education in Iowa.

B. (if) you are asked who gave the name say: About two months ago we sent a questionnaire to your home that asked people if they were willing to help us with this study. Whoever sent the questionnaire back to us said that (respondent's name) might be willing to help.

C. (if) respondent is not available, ask when to call back and record this information on the "outcome" portion of the interview log form.

D. (if) the connection is made, proceed as follows:

(script 2.) **HELLO, MR./MRS. ...., MY NAME IS XXXX. I AM CALLING FOR THE STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION. YOUR NAME WAS GIVEN TO US AS SOMEONE WHO MIGHT BE WILLING TO ANSWER SOME QUESTIONS ABOUT EDUCATION IN IOWA. DO YOU HAVE A FEW MINUTES TO TALK?**

E. (if) the respondent asks who gave the name, go to B. above.

F. (if) the respondent says no, try to arrange a call back and record the information on the log form. If the person refuses the interview, enter "refusal" on the log form.

(script 3) **WE ARE NOW READY TO BEGIN. HERE IS THE FIRST QUESTION.**

1. Do you feel that the public schools in Iowa are effective? (Note: This is a warm-up question and we are not interested in detailed responses. Get the answer quickly and then move on.)

_____

_____

2. Were you able to complete highschool? yes____ no____
(if yes, go to script 5, if no, continue)

3. (if no) Have you ever participated in adult education classes to earn a high school diploma?

yes____ no____

4. (if yes) For how many weeks have you participated in adult classes?

_____
number of weeks

5. Are you over eighteen years old? yes_____ no_____

(if) the respondent does not have a high school diploma, has not attended adult high school classes for MORE THAN A TOTAL OF TWO WEEKS, and is 18 or more then say:

(script 4) **YOU ARE JUST THE KIND OF PERSON WE NEED TO TALK TO. WE WILL PAY YOU FIVE DOLLARS IF YOU WILL ANSWER THE REST OF OUR QUESTIONS. IT WILL TAKE ABOUT TEN MINUTES MORE. WE WILL ASK YOU FOR THE INFORMATION WE NEED TO SEND YOUR CHECK AFTER THE INTERVIEW. ALL YOUR ANSWERS WILL BE CONFIDENTIAL.**

(if) the respondent does not meet the criteria for the study, say:

(script 5) **THANKYOU FOR HELPING US WITH OUR SURVEY AND FOR HELPING US TO IMPROVE EDUCATION IN IOWA.** (Then terminate the interview and indicate that the person was not eligible on the interview log.)

6. Earlier you said that you have not been able to complete high school. Could you tell me why you didn't complete highschool?
(probe: eg. could you tell me more?)

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

7. Do you think your life might be different if you had been able to complete high school?

yes_____ no_____

7a. (if yes) How do you think your life might be different if you had been able to complete high school? (probe)

7b (if no) Why don't you think your life might be different if you had completed high school? (probe)

(part II)

(script 6.) **THERE ARE MANY REASONS WHY PEOPLE WHO HAVE NOT FINISHED HIGH SCHOOL DO NOT GO TO ADULT CLASSES TO EARN A DIPLOMA. I AM GOING TO READ A LIST OF REASONS WHICH ARE TRUE FOR SOME OF THE PEOPLE WE HAVE TALKED TO. AFTER EACH REASON I AM GOING TO STOP. THEN PLEASE TELL ME HOW TRUE THIS REASON IS FOR YOU. TELL ME IF THE REASON IS NOT TRUE FOR YOU, SOMEWHAT TRUE, OR VERY TRUE.**

(note: if a person says that a reason is not applicable to them, mark it NOT true)

ARE YOU READY? HOW TRUE FOR YOU ARE THE FOLLOWING REASONS WHY ADULTS DO NOT TAKE CLASSES TO COMPLETE HIGH SCHOOL?

(Note: It is very important for you to emphasize "for you", both at the beginning and whenever you feel that you need to remind the respondent)

	not true	somewhat true	very true
8. School is too hard	1	2	3
9. I don't have enough free time to go back to school	1	2	3

(repeat choices here [not true, somewhat true, very true] and whenever you feel that the respondant needs a reminder)

10. I am too old to go back to school	1	2	3
11. I don't need a diploma	1	2	3
12. I am usually too tired to go back to school	1	2	3
13. There is too much on my mind to go back to school	1	2	3
14. I haven't known where there are any classes	1	2	3
15. I have to take care of my family	1	2	3
16. I am too lazy to go back to school	1	2	3

	not true	somewhat true	very true
17. Going back to adult classes would be like going to high school all over again	1	2	3
18. I have too many time conflicts at work to go back to school	1	2	3
19. I don't think that adult high school classes would be very good	1	2	3
20. I don't think I could use the things I would learn in school	1	2	3
21. I don't go back to school because nobody knows I don't already have an education	1	2	3
22. I don't think I am smart enough to go back to school	1	2	3
23. I didn't like school so I don't want to go back	1	2	3
24. I don't know anything about adult high school classes	1	2	3
25. I am too set in my ways to go back to school	1	2	3
26. I already know enough	1	2	3
27. I don't have the energy to go back to school	1	2	3
28. I move around too much to go back to school	1	2	3
29. It would take me too long to finish high school	1	2	3
30. There aren't many people in adult high school classes who are my age	1	2	3

	not true	somewhat true	very true
31. I am not motivated enough to go back to school	1	2	3
32. My friends might laugh at me if I went back to school	1	2	3
33. Going back to school wouldn't make me any smarter	1	2	3
34. I would feel strange going back to school	1	2	3
35. I just don't like school	1	2	3
36. A high school diploma wouldn't improve my life	1	2	3
37. I couldn't pay for child care or transportation	1	2	3
38. I felt that my family wouldn't like it if I went back to school	1	2	3
39. It would cost me too much money to go back to school	1	2	3

(part III)

(script 7) **THANKYOU. NOW I AM GOING TO ASK YOU SOME QUESTIONS ABOUT YOURSELF. REMEMBER THAT ALL YOUR ANSWERS WILL BE CONFIDENTIAL.**

40. In what country were you born? _____

41. Are you married, never married, separated or divorced or widowed?

married? _____
never married? _____
separated/divorced? _____
widowed? _____

42. How many children do you have? _____
number

43. (if has children) How many children are now living in your home?

_____
number

44. About how many people live in the community, town or city where you live: 5000 or less, more than 5000 but less than 10,000, more than 10,000 but less than 100,000, 100,00 or more. (repeat a second time if necessary)

5000 or less _____

more than 5000 but less than 10,000 _____

more than 10,000 but less than 100,000 _____

100,000 or more _____

45. What is your sex? male_____ female _____

46. How would you describe your employment? Are you employed full-time, employed part-time, a full-time homemaker, or retired?

(check all that apply)

employed full-time _____

employed part-time _____

full-time homemaker _____

retired _____

other response (list) _____

46a. (if employed full or part-time) How satisfied are you with your job, not satisfied, somewhat satisfied, or very satisfied?

(circle one below)

not satisfied	somewhat satisfied	very satisfied

47. What is the last grade you completed in regular school?

_____
grade

48. How would you describe your health: poor, below average, average, above average or excellent?

(circle)

poor below average average above average excellent

49. Do you have any disabilities that prevent you from working or make it difficult for you to get around?

yes _____ no _____

50. (If yes) Could you describe your disability?

_____

_____

51. What is your age? _____
years

52. Approximately what is your total annual household income, that is the income of everyone in your home added together? (before taxes)

_____
income

(script 8) **THANK YOU FOR GIVING YOUR TIME TO HELP US IMPROVE EDUCATION IN IOWA. WE ARE NOW FINISHED, BUT BEFORE WE HANG-UP I NEED TO GET THE INFORMATION WE NEED TO PROCESS YOUR CHECK FOR FIVE DOLLARS.** (complete the check payment form and then terminate in a friendly manner)

(if) they ask how we can promise confidentiality if we have their names, explain that the information we need to pay them will be recorded on a separate sheet. Their names will not be on the same sheet as the answers to the questions.